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Introduction: Why do we suddenly talk so much about constructiveness?

The talk about "constructive journalism" is currently gaining a great deal of attention in the newsrooms of many broadcasters, newspapers and online news sites – and increasingly also in the academic discussions. Here "constructive" means that journalism should focus not only on social problems, but also on the possible solutions and spaces of action in their coverage. This would, it is argued, lead to positive social impact and to committed readership through better audience engagement (Haagerup 2014; Gyldensted 2015).

The self-corrective ethos of the idea centres on challenging journalism's tendency to focus on negativity. Crime, conflict, accidents and all kinds of threats are likely to make the headlines, while positive developments are often less dramatic and therefore go unnoticed under the news radar. This is seen to paint an overly gloomy picture of social reality, which contributes to the sense of hopelessness among audiences, who easily turn away from the news that cause them anxiety (Haagerup 2014). Constructive journalism draws inspiration and techniques from positive psychology to create engaging and inspiring stories that would provide the audience views forward (McIntyre 2015). Therefore, it underlines the role of emotion, solution formation and future orientation in news coverage (ibid.).

In the European context, the idea has received positive resonance among journalism professionals, especially in public broadcasting companies. The "constructive movement" is thus largely formed on the basis of professional networking: for example, The Constructive Institute is an independent organisation that works closely with Aarhus University in Denmark, providing research and training (https://constructiveinstitute.org/). Several schools and universities teaching journalism have added courses on "going constructive" in their curricula; for instance Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands has a chair for a Professor of Constructive Journalism. In addition, European Public Broadcasting Union (EBU) is currently organizing master classes in constructive journalism. Partly stemming from these networks, several academic and professional conferences on constructive journalism have taken place in the past two years.

In the United States, similar ideas circulate and networking takes place under the title of solutions journalism (e.g. Solutions Journalism Network, www.solutionsjournalism.org). Some talk about solutions and constructive journalism as interchangeable; indeed, also solutions journalism questions the negativity and problem frames in news journalism and seeks to engage audiences by providing them with tools for action. Here, the main argument is that journalism should highlight existing models, solutions and responses that are showing results against the most pressing problems (Dryer 2015). The clearest difference to constructive journalism arises, however, from the fact that the argument is not similarly rooted in psychology (McIntyre 2015).

The idea of constructiveness seems fresh and old at the same time. From the perspective of journalism studies, constructive journalism can be placed among several other journalistic reforms – theories, ideas, movements or approaches – that have in various

ways proposed a more constructive role for journalism. So, it appears that the current discussions around the newcomer, constructive journalism, has reactivated the theoretical discussions that are familiar from other "constructive approaches" in journalism. At the same time, the academic discourse demands a more precise definition of the constructive journalism concept.

This is the starting point of this special issue: to study the recent discussions around constructive journalism and to place the central arguments in historical, cultural and political contexts. We need to take a careful look at where the call for constructiveness is coming from and what exactly is journalism supposed to be constructing. We also need to ask how constructiveness is understood and turned into practices and responses. This kind of mapping will help us understand why we are suddenly talking so much about constructiveness, both in the field of journalism practice and research.

Reworking the social responsibility of journalism

One of the critical questions that is often posed to the constructive journalism discourse is: "Isn't this just good journalism?" Do we need a new term to discuss what we want from journalism? Some might say that the call for being constructive brings a new wave of normativity to the field of journalism. If one of the goals of journalism is "to move society forward", who gets to determine the direction? This debate about the social responsibility of journalism has resurfaced in different contexts and with different emphases (Christians & Nordenstreng 2004).

In this terrain, we can identify various approaches that call for some kind of self-correction of journalism. For example, peace journalism emerged already in the 1970s and was reinvigorated in the 1990s by reflections around the Gulf War coverage as well as the crises in Rwanda and Yugoslavia (Hanitzsch 2007) and later on in Afghanistan (Ottosen 2009). The movement draws inspiration from peace and conflict research, and the self-corrective aim for journalism is focused around war coverage. It advocates for journalists' commitment to peace-building and the need to break away from news values that direct the journalists' work towards negativity, violence and elite actors in conflict coverage (Galtung 2003). Peace journalism and conflict-sensitive journalism aim for creating "constructive rather than destructive effects in conflict-stressed environments" (Howard 2015, 66). Furthermore, the concept of mediative journalism proposed by Wetzstein (2010) goes deeper into the domain of public diplomacy and underlines the role of journalism in peace mediation processes around international conflicts.

While peace journalism and mediative journalism deal with topics that are on the global agenda, some other models have been developed to tackle more local issues. In the early 1990s in the United States, a movement called public journalism (sometimes also referred to as civic journalism) emerged. Public journalism started out as a professional self-reflection over election coverage and later spread to other areas of domestic reporting, such as city budgeting, neighborhood development or controversies between ethnic groups

(Rosen 1999). Public journalism gained substantial interest in the academia, mostly in the U.S. but also more globally (Romano 2010). The need for a self-correction in public journalism was focused on the notion of the public sphere. The idea was to make public life more accessible for citizens through journalism: more open, diverse, deliberative and focused on problem-solving (Haas 2007).

With the emergence of more sophisticated digital tools and online platforms, the idea of increased citizen participation in commenting and crafting journalism grew larger. The focus shifted away from the local to the networked context. Here we can identify the emergence of participatory journalism (Singer et al. 2011) that peaked in 2008–2010 as an academic object of study (Borger et al. 2013). Borger et al. indicate that the corrective move here is focused on how digital technologies should guide journalists to help audiences to become more involved in making and disseminating news (ibid., 117). However, with the emergence of social networking sites especially, the notion of networked journalism has recently taken the position of participatory journalism as a central object of study (Russell 2016).

Separate, yet connected "new journalisms"

Although constructive journalism and the other above mentioned forms of journalism stem from the same terrain of social responsibility (see also Hautakangas and Ahva in this special issue, Figure 1), in general they have been discussed surprisingly separately. One reason for this is that some of the forms are clearly more practical and have been more influential among practicing journalists, whereas some are more theory-oriented and discussed mainly in the academic context. Therefore, cross-references might have remained limited even if apparent connections can be recognized. In terms of constructive and solutions journalism, for example, the movements have been around for a while already in the form of professional training and networking, but the academic interest has been limited and is only now starting to emerge. Another reason for the disconnection is that the models often emphasize different aspects of journalism. For example, participatory and networked journalism clearly focus on technological affordances, whereas constructive or public journalism seem to be more about adjusting the professional mindset. Furthermore, time orientations seem to vary: peace journalism gives journalists the permission to revisit history and look at slow processes, whereas constructive and solutions journalists are very outspoken about the need to think forward.

The discussed models also address social problems of different magnitudes; their focus ranges from local to global issues. Therefore, even if there might be fruitful conceptual connections to be made between peace journalism and public journalism, for example, the domains in which they operate are so different from each other that cross-examination is not often made. However, there have been attempts to combine the movements such as peace, public and community journalism, for example under the umbrella term of deliberative journalism (Romano 2010).

Furthermore, each approach is typically centered on slightly different keywords and they draw from various research fields, ranging from psychology to political science. This, in turn, creates differences in terms of argumentation; other models are developed from more individualistic starting points (e.g. how negative coverage affects the audience members as individuals), whereas others start from more collective frame (e.g. how journalism can be part of reconnecting citizens, journalists and decisions makers for improving the public life). The practical working methods developed within the various movements may thus have strong resemblances, but their underlying philosophies can differ greatly.

It is evident that also branding and competition affect the joint discussion about these movements. The proponents of the practice-based movements wish to raise attention within the news industry, and the more theoretically oriented models compete for attention in the academic field. This, we believe, has partly resulted in how the approaches or conceptualizations are branded as "new journalisms". It is a concise and at the same time provocative move to coin a "new journalism" in search of inspiration, motivation, research funding or economic sustainability. Therefore, it is also easy to get irritated by yet another new model of journalism – a fact that may also hinder fruitful cross-examination.

All these differences need to be explicated, but we argue they should not limit discussion.

In this special issue: complementary viewpoints to constructiveness

In this special issue, several scholars discuss the issue of "constructiveness" in journalism from their differing, yet complementary viewpoints. Active proponents and developers of constructive journalism want to clarify and specify what they mean with the concept (see McIntyre and Gyldensted in this issue). There is also a need to understand the broader socio-cultural context where the entire approach stems from (Hermans and Drok). It is also fruitful to scrutinise the public discourse around constructive and solutions journalism, the claims that are made in the professional discussions about constructive journalism – and perhaps even more importantly, the claims that are avoided (Aitamurto and Varma). In addition, by analyzing the elements of public/private or citizenship/consumerism, scholars are able to show how these dimensions seem to be present at the same time in the ways how constructive journalism is defined and practiced (From and Kristensen).

In addition to conceptual analysis and development, we also need to understand what happens when "a new form of journalism" gets introduced to the practising journalists: how do new concepts help journalists to rework their ideas and practices of doing journalism (Hautakangas and Ahva)? And we need to be sensitive to the fact that ideas and concepts may get differing responses and interpretations depending on the social and cultural context they are introduced (Perisin and Kovacevic).

Naturally, if the general aim of different constructive forms of journalism is to inflict social change by engaging audiences and activating citizens, there is a great need to study how audiences respond to constructiveness (Meier). In the current digital media

environment, especially the particularities of designing constructive online interaction must be taken into account (Sundnes Løvlie).

These various motivations make it understandable why even the scholars within this special issue do not have a joint understanding of what exactly is referred to by "constructive journalism", or how to best connect the current debates with the other forms discussed above. For us, this indicates that constructive journalism is a powerful yet porous term that compels scholars to situate it according to their own expertise areas or previous experiences. Constructiveness can open different sets of questions when examined from the viewpoint of audiences, social institutions or news practices – and this special issue welcomes you to join this discussion!

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